DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 395 106 CE 070 919

AUTHOR	Neuman, Susan B.
TITLE	Families Reading Together: Adult Education Students and Their Preschool Children.
INSTITUTION	Temple Univ., Philadelphia, Pa.
SPONS AGENCY	Pennsylvania State Dept. of Education, Harrisburg. Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education.
PUB DATE	95
CONTRACT	98-5028
NOTE	56p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; Adult Students; *Childrens Literature; Demonstration Programs; *Family Programs; *Literacy Education; Preschool Education; Program Implementation; *Reading Instruction; Reading Materials; Student Motivation; Values Clarification
IDENTIFIERS	353 Project; *Family Literacy

ABSTRACT

Through a participatory approach to adult basic education, a project was conducted to break the debilitating cycle of illiteracy that passes from low-income parents to their children. The approach included a family literacy book club designed to encourage parents and children to read together and to improve parents' literacy skills, interests, and confidence to serve as educators of their children. Training and guided reading experiences were provided to parents, and workshops were provided to the school faculty to develop appropriate literacy understanding and teaching skills. The program was highly successful in creating a participatory model of adult basic education. A progress checklist showed changes in students' writing activities, reading abilities, and their uses of strategies in task applications. An analysis of interactional strategies indicated that parents became more responsive to their children in reading and provided information on labeling, scaffolding, and extending learning beyond the printed page. The program also introduced parents to children's literature and facilitated discussion and values clarification among the parents. Video segments demonstrating the parents' work with children's literature and sample workbook materials were developed. (Contains 72 references, and an annotated list of 12 children's books is appended.) (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 395 106

Families Reading Together: Adult Education Students and their Preschool Children

Susan B. Neuman
437 Ritter Hall
Temple University
Philadelphia, PA. 19122

Contract No.98-5028, Contract Year 1994-95

The activity which is the subject of this report was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education or the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and no official endorsement by these agencies should be inferred.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C Kolman

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CE070719

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

Title: "Families Reading Together: Adult Education Students and their Preschool Children

Address: Susan Neuman, Ed.D., Associate Professor, CITE Department, Coordinator, Reading & Language Arts, Graduate Program;
Temple University College of Education Ritter Hall, Philadelphia, PA 191222 215-204-4982

In collaboration with the McKinley Elementary School and Family Center.
Director: Susan Neuman, Ed.D. **Funding** $30, 344
Duration of Project: July 1994 to June 1995 **Number of Months:** 12

Purpose

Families Reading Together was designed to break the debilitating cycle of illiteracy that passes from low-income parents to their children. Its purpose was to create sustained literacy and developmental benefits for families. This model was designed be disseminated to adult education providers working with economically disadvantaged parents throughout Pennsylvania To implement this program, a participatory approach to A.B.E. was developed, along with a family literacy Book Club, designed to encourage parents and children to read together and to improve parents literacy skills, interests, and confidence in their ability to serve as educators to children. Training and guided reading experiences were provided to parents, and workshops were provided to the school faculty to develop appropriate literacy understandings and teaching skills.

Summary of Findings:

Families Reading Together was highly successful in creating a participatory model of A.B.E. We developed an approach designed to link literacy learning with issues that concerned participants in their daily lives. A progress checklist, adapted from Auebach, indicated changes in students' writing activities, reading abilities, and their uses of strategies in task applications. Further, analyses of book club activities reported changes in Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, used as a measure of receptive language, as well as children's Concepts of Print. Finally, an examination of interactional strategies indicated that parents' became more responsive to their children in reading, and provided information on labeling scaffolding and extending learning beyond the printed page.

Products

Video segments have been developed, demonstrating children's literature sessions. In addition, sample workbook materials are available.

Introduction

Families Reading Together was designed to break the debilitating cycle of illiteracy that passes from parents to their children by creating a model family literacy program in collaboration with the McKinley Elementary School and Family Center. To accomplish this goal, Temple University in collaboration with school personnel developed a demonstration project, including an A.B.E. program for parents, and a family literacy program designed to enhance the transmission of literacy learning from parents to children.

Families Reading Together was designed to address the needs of young parents (70% Latino and 30% African-American) who have dropped out of high school as a consequence of economic circumstances, language difficulties and poor academic achievement. This project, therefore, was developed to enhance parents' own literacy skills as well as those of their young children. It was based on the principle of "investing in two generations at a time," (Schorr, 1987)--the belief that parents' strong desire to help their children provides motivation for participating and sustaining their efforts in learning how to read.

The targeted audience for this program have faced many barriers in becoming educators to their children. Research suggests that parents with limited needs for literacy in their work-place and social settings are often unprepared to assist their children in learning (Edwards & Panofsky, 1989; Nickse, Speicher, & Buchek, 1988). As a result, studies (Anastasiow, 1982; Berlin & Sum, 1988) suggest that their children often begin life educationally behind their more advantaged peers. Research consistently reports evidence of their limited language, vocabulary and problem-solving skills (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn & Morgan, 1987). Further, these learning difficulties appear to present even greater obstacles as they continue in formal education. Indeed, studies (Darling, 1989; Nickse & Englander, 1985) have documented that these children often later become school drop-outs themselves.

Thus, this project was concerned about the potentially serious intergenerational pattern that tends to be established in these families: parents with low level literacy skills may not be aware that certain, activities, materials, and types of interactions can play an important role in early literacy development, which may ultimately influence their own child's interest and preparedness for school instruction.

This project was designed to build on research that has shown dramatic results for literacy improvement on the part of the young parents, as well as that of their children when participating in similar types of program activities (Neuman & Gallagher, 1994). In addition to A.B.E. classes, the model focused on the benefits of parent interaction with preschoolers and the progress that adult literacy students can make as a result of the literacy-based activities with their own children--a critical aspect of the project model. It enabled parents to work with and develop materials for their children, supportive of future literacy learning after the completion of the grant period. Therefore, this project was designed to develop a family literacy program that will emphasize the critical role that parents' enhanced literacy skills can serve in children's early reading preparation. (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Nickse & Englander, 1985).

Family literacy programs are crucial because in hardship conditions like extreme poverty or poor health like the families attending the McKinley Family Center, it may be difficult for caregivers to develop activities that encourage their children's optimal growth and development. As a result, successful programs rest on a multi-faceted approach: Parent literacy education through A.B.E. training in a supportive environment and family literacy activities that enhance language and literacy for their young children. Thus, through these activities, the **Families Reading Together** was designed to provide a "seamless web" of educational

services to parents and their children in the local community, enhancing the language and literacy of families.

This project, conducted from July, 1994 through June, 1995 by Dr. Susan B. Neuman, was developed with the help of several key personnel:

Dr. Donna Celano, Project Coordinator, Temple University

Ms. Lynda Panetta, McKinley School Principal

Elaine Carter, Norris Square Family Center

Leeann Ayers, Mayor's Office, Family Center

This model has been disseminated in several forms: through state conferences in Pennsylvania, national conferences, and through journal publications. In addition, we created video segments to augment training with parents, and auxiliary instructional materials. Further, this report can be requested through the Department of Education, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA. 17126-0333.

The Family Literacy Program

Goals and Objectives of the Program

Our project was designed to institute an A.B.E. program for parents in the McKinley Family Center, and to create a family literacy program which included methods and opportunities for parents to engage with children in the McKinley Family center. This program was designed to increase parents' motivation to complete their A.B.E. program, as well as allow them to improve their own reading comprehension, writing, and thinking skills and apply them when working with their children.

Specifically, the following goals and objectives were developed:

o Institute an A.B.E program for families at the McKinley Family Center.

o Improve by 25% the interest and confidence of parents in their ability to read, write, and serve as educators to their own children, measured by the "Locus of Control/ Reading Attitude Scale";

o Improve by 25% the knowledge and specific information about approaches to family literacy and to the staff of the McKinley Family Center --teachers, health professionals, social workers, counselors, day care staff, so that they can support the work of the participants;

o Develop a workshop series where 50% of the participating parents will have an opportunity to engage in a reading/discussion series concerning language, literacy, and literature in an intergenerational setting.

Procedures

Recruitment

Parents from the McKinley Elementary School and the Norris Square Family Center were recruited to participate in the A.B.E. program through flyers, special events (a welcoming party); and a town meeting held in the beginning of September. Twelve parents initially signed up for the program; 75% of the participants wished for E.S.L. training, while the others were interested an A.B.E. program. Further recruitment included meeting with local church personnel, placing signs in local stores, as well as meeting with local leaders in organizations including the Norris Square Civic Center, and the Mayor's Commission for Literacy, and the Family Center central office. We found that recruitment was necessary throughout the year. Classes ranged from a low of 5 to 20 participants during different stages of the project.

A.B.E. Program

Prior to beginning the project, we addressed the following issues:

o What would we count as success in our program?

o How might we conduct a needs assessment?

- How should the curriculum be determined?
- What was the organizing principle of the curriculum?

Through meetings with participants, consultants, and school personnel, we developed a participatory approach to adult basic education, one which engaged parents in curriculum development at every stage of the process. Students participated in identifying issues, generating content, producing materials, and evaluated their own literacy learning. In this respect, we hoped to engage them more integrally in the process of learning, becoming active participants in their own and their children's education. Our role, in contrast to the traditional teacher leader, was that of a "facilitator," helping student to pose problems, and link solutions to make changes in their lives. To do this, we created a structure for each lesson, which included "opening activities," helping participants with daily tasks, reading activities, writing activities, and "homework" for those who wanted to practice writing and reading in daily contexts. A sample lesson in Table 1 is provided on the following page.

Since the goals and skills of our participants varied dramatically, we also realized that objective evidence of progress in literacy would not be as valuable as subjective evidence. Initial scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education suggested that gains could not be measured meaningfully. Six of the participants were not able to score on the test at all. Thus, to examine participants growing skills, confidence, and interests in their reading and writing, we refined a progress checklist adapted from Auerbach (1992), focusing on participants developing strengths and skills (see Table 2).

Several indicators of success were recorded. First, we created a participatory model of curriculum development which was linked to the social context in which these parents resided. In this manner, we believe that we created a model that might be useful for other adult education programs. Second, we found that students

progressed dramatically in the program. Their journal activities indicated changes in writing and changes in their uses of literacy (one woman even published a poem in the local newspaper). Third, there was evidence of metacognitive changes in their reading/writing processes. Some of the participants even began to read during their spare time, engaged more frequently in homework activities, and used literacy for advocacy purposes in the community. Fourth, there were indication that literacy was being used to create changes in the community. For example, headed by one of the woman in our program, a committee was established to create a police substation in the area. She presented the problem at a local community meeting, developed a petition (which we had discussed in class) and eventually sent the petition to the Mayor's Office.

A number of problems, however, clearly surfaced during the year. First involved security. Although the Family Center was theoretically open until 6:00 each night, there were few individuals in the Center, the area was dangerous and no security was available. Second, day care was difficult due to safety factors, and variable attendance rates. For example, on one day, two children accompanied parents; on another day, there were nine children. Thus, it was difficult to determine child-care needs on a regular basis. Third, we realized that our program would most likely be enhanced if two classes were provided: one for E.S.L. and one for A.B.E., targeting the needs of all participants.

Given these considerations, however, the project developed a model that was responsive to the community, and focused on the strengths of participants and not their inadequacies. We engaged individuals in reading/writing processes that were authentic, communicative, and student-centered. We believe that this approach has important implications for developing participatory models in adult basic instruction.

The Book Club

Our workshop series was designed to help parents acquire the necessary skills to conduct educational activities with their children. These training sessions included reading and discussion related to literacy education, practice sessions in educational situations with their children in the Family center. During this time, they were coached to 1) Draw attention and label objects of interest to their children; 2) "Scaffold" children's efforts through demonstrations and modeling; and 3) Respond "contingently" to children's comments by expanding the content of the child's utterance, clarifying questions which demand accountability from the child and answering the child's questions.

Following these sessions, we began a series of "book club" discussions, which occurred over a 4-month period. Parents from the A.B.E. program, as well as parents from Head Start, were recruited to participate, for a total of 28 parents. Sessions were scheduled twice a week, for one and one half hours, to engage parents and children in reading together. Each session centered around a children's literature selection, and followed a similar format:

o Introductory activities

o Presentation of the genre (narrative; expository; predictable text) and the children's literature book

o Demonstration of a reading strategy (making predictions, formulating questions)

o Practice in pairs

o Group discussion

o Preparation for the reading at home and book borrowing

o Reading the story along with their children

Sessions were audiotaped. Teachers reviewed each reading between parent and child for evidence of reading strategies used, difficulties noted, as well as interactional patterns between parent and child.

These data were analyzed for the proportion of interactions that clarified, and extended information in the story, labeled, scaffolded and were contingently responsive to the children's comments and questions. Our analysis indicated that certain books enhanced parents' interactions with children. Stories that were most predictable (i.e., the Very Hungary Caterpillar) encouraged greater interaction between parent and child, particularly for those parents who were of lower proficiency in reading than others. Other stories, like "Corduroy" appeared somewhat more difficult to read; thus, fewer interactions typically occurred between parent and child. These results suggest that what parents may read to a child might influence how a reading occurs, and the benefit it may have on encouraging cognitively challenging talk for the children. Table 3 indicates the books selected in the book club program.

Pre- and posttest measures were conducted in the Book Club program. Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, shown to be strongly predictive of reading success, was used as a measure of receptive language. In addition, the Concepts of Print, administered to the child of each parent in the program, was designed to measure gains in children's understanding of letters, book and print conventions. Both measures indicated significant differences between pre- and post test adminstrations.

Consequently, the Book Club was a significant success at the McKinley School and Family Center. First, it engaged parents in regularly reading to their children. This part of the program, in particular, helped to reinforce a primary school goal to encourage greater parent involvement. Thus, teachers and the principal, were highly enthusiastic, and frequently indicated their support of the

program. Second, it reinforced basic reading strategies that were being taught in the A.B.E. program, transmitting skills from parent to child. Third, the book club program provided opportunities for parent to familiarize themselves with children's literature, and some of the important precursors to children's literacy development. As a result, it encouraged and reinforced the importance of families reading together.

We decided, therefore, not to administer alternate forms of the TABE and the "Locus of Control Attitude Measure" on the basis of their lack of sensitivity to changes in parent attitudes and skills. We were concerned about turning parents away with traditional testing measures. Further, we believed that our methods of coding, and measuring progress were far more innovative, and accurate indicators of change in our family literacy program.

Workshops for Staff

Two workshops for staff were conducted toward the end of the year regarding our program. We focused on several key issues:

o Level of expectation. We discussed reading and writing curriculum that would engage our young children in higher levels of thinking, and the ways in which parents might support such learning.

o Involvement with parents. We focused on the success of the Book Clubs in promoting children's reading skills prior to formal training. We also suggested alternative ways in which parents might be involved in reading, even when they were not proficient in reading themselves.

o Developing workshops so that parents in the future might have a better indication of what teachers expected of children, in terms of their academic and social skills.

Coordination and Dissemination

Dissemination of the family literacy project was coordinated along with the McKinley School administration. Several approaches to dissemination were used. One method of dissemination was to meet with school staff. Here, we focused on better collaboration between parents in the school and teachers. Second, we attended two state conferences to disseminate information about our program with other adult literacy projects. Sample materials were distributed to provide examples of a "participatory approach to adult education." We developed video segments of the book club, and workshop with parents. We also created a picture album of different events throughout the year, which was prominently displayed on a bulletin board at McKinley School. Third, we created sample lesson plans in a workbook format, which we plan to disseminate to other family centers throughout the state. Fourth, we presented our findings of the Family Literacy Program at the International Reading Association meeting in Anaheim California, in May 1995.

References

Anastasiow, N. (1982). The adolescent parent. Baltimore, MD: Brooks.

Berlin, G. & Sum, A. (1988). Toward a more perfect union: Basic skills, poor families, and our economic future. NY: Ford Foundation.

Darling, S. (1989). Kenan Trust family literacy project and program model. Louisville, KY: Kenan Trust Family Literacy Project.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1990). Literacy for empowerment. New York: Falmer Press.

Edwards, P. A. & Panofsky, C.P. (1989). The effect of two training procedures on the book reading of lower-SES mothers and children. In S.M. McCormick, & J. Zutell (Eds.), Cognitive and social perspectives for literacy research and instruction (pp. 35-43). Chicago, Il: National Reading Conference.

Furstenberg, F. , Brooks-Gunn, J., & Morgan, S.P. (1987). Adolescent mothers in later life. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Heath, S.B. (1983). Ways with words. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Neuman, S.B. & Gallagher, P. (in press). Joining together in literacy learning: Teenage mothers and their children. Reading Research Quarterly.

Neuman, S.B., & Roskos, K. (1993). Access to print for children of poverty: Differential effects of adult mediation and literacy-enriched play settings on environmental and functional print tasks. American Educational Research Journal, 30, 95-122.

Nickse, R.S. & Englander, N. (1985). At-risk parents: Collaborations for literacy, an intergenerational reading project. Equity and Choice, 1, 11-18.

Nickse, R. Speicher, A.M. & Buchek, P.C. (1988). An intergenerational adult literacy project: A family intervention/prevention model. Journal of Reading, 31, 634-642.

Table 1: A Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan

November 15-17, 1994

A. Independent Time (This is time when people are still coming in)

Participants pick up their journal. PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW STUDENTS TO TAKE HOME THEIR JOURNALS. They are to reread their journal from the day before; reflect on anything that has been written to them; reread any information and write if they would like. Encourage them to write more on the topic if they like.

This is the time when they should go over any bills, letters, materials that they might need personal help in reading/writing or discussing. Individual help is given.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Library forms
Temple University stationery
Dictionaries (for help)
Business letters
Telephone book
Chart paper

B. Reading

Emphasis: USING THE LIBRARY

Goal: Find out where the library is in their area
Focusing on the many different areas in the library: videos, magazines, newspapers, books
Filling out a library card form
Discussing the various roles of people in the library
Trying to use the library

DAY 1: HAVE JOURNAL NEXT TO EACH PERSON. WRITE IN THE JOURNAL, "USING THE LIBRARY"

Say to the participants, "Some of you have mentioned the library, and visiting the library. Can you tell me where one is near the neighborhood? Can you help describe how to get there?

HAVE THE STUDENTS WRITE DOWN THE AREA

Say, "What are some of the things you can find there?"
Have students write down, books, newspapers, etc.. Do you ever go there with your kids? Why? Why not? What are some of the rules of the library? Write some of the rules together.

THEY MAY WANT TO WRITE DOWN SOME OF THESE RULES

Say, "Today I brought a form that will allow you to get a library card. (Even though they may have one, fill out the form together. YOU DO IT AT THE SAME TIME THAT THEY DO IT). Say, "I'm going to read the first sentence. Then, ask someone to reread the sentence, so that everyone can be successful. Talk about the problems in filling out the form.

C. Writing

Focus: Business letter, petition

Say, "We've been talking about getting a substation in the area. We've been wanting to send a letter to people who have power in the local area. Can you tell me who some of these people are?:

WRITE DOWN THESE NAMES (on chart paper)

Say, "It is important if we want action, to write a formal business letter. There are very strict rule is writing these types of letters. I brought some in to show you." Share these letters. What do they have in common

ON CHART PAPER, HAVE THEM DISCUSS THE PARTS OF A BUSINESS LETTER. MAKE A PRETEND LETTER FORMAT (business address etc...).

"Remember, each of you wrote something about a substation. Well would you like to each write a letter about it? Or would you like to write a joint letter? (Talk about this).

Then give them scrap paper, and have them begin to write their letter or a joint letter. Make sure to talk about it, and use the chart paper for

various words that people need to spell. Be sure to say that this is just a "sloppy copy." Tomorrow we will read them to each other and we will get feedback on them. YOU AS TEACHER SHOULD BE WRITING AS WELL.

D. Wrap-up

It is extremely important to wrap up each day with a discussion of what you did. Review what you did (words etc...), then discuss what you will do tomorrow. Then ask them to write in the journal how they felt about their lesson. Was it too hard? Too easy? What would they like to learn about next?

PREVIEW: Tomorrow you will be continuing to talk about the library. You will finish filling out the form, and will review the vocabulary associated with the library. You will be talking about the various roles of people in the library. You can bring in a library book.

You will continue to write your letter about the substation, and will ask them to bring in the names and addresses of people who they can send this to. Also, you should encourage them to bring in anything that concerns or delights them to share with one another.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 2: Charting Students' Progress

Progress Checklist

Name _____ Date _____

Personal, affective changes — Before Cycle — End Cycle

- o feeling safe, feeling at ease
- o willing to take risks
- o longer attention span
- o ability to identify personal learning goals
- o ability to address personal problems
- o other _____

Social changes outside the classroom

- o participation in community activities
- o increased responsibility
- o social networking
- o using community resources
- o assisting, supporting peers
- o other _____

Changes in relation to children's schooling

- o more support at home
- o more contact with school
- o advocacy on children's behalf
- o participation in parent groups
- o other _____

Changes in writing

- o mechanics (letter formation, spelling, etc....
- o length of written pieces
- o ability to generate ideas
- o ability to draft and revise
- o elaboration of ideas
- o organization
- o ability to write about personal experiences
- o ability to write analytically

o other _____

Changes in reading

o predicting
o using prior knowledge
o skimming, previewing
o using context
o guessing
o sound/letter/word identification
o ability to relate reading to personal experiences
o awareness of strategies
o other _____

Changes in oral language use

o comprehension
o ability to ask for clarification
o clarity of pronunciation
o immediacy of response
o length of utterances
o taking the initiative
o taking risks
o ability to express opinions
o ability to question/challenge
o other _____

Metacognitive changes

o awareness of progress/goals
o awareness of reading/writing processes
o ability to monitor and choose strategies
o ability to ask for assistance
o ability to make choices about language use
o other _____

Changes in uses of literacy

o functional uses in specific contexts
o using literacy for personal expression
o using literacy in family interaction
o using literacy for religious purposes
o using literacy for advocacy
o using literacy for learning
o other _____

Table 3. Children's Literature Selections

Very Predictable

The Very Hungary Catepiller

Over in the Meadow

Henny Penny

Is Your Mama a Llama

Caps for Sale

One Hungry Monster

Predictable

Anancy and Mr. Drybones

The Little Engine that Could

The Red Hen

Whose Mouse are You?

Narrative

The Snowy Day

Cordoroy

The Children's Literature Hour:

A Social-Constructivist Approach to Family Literacy

Susan B. Neuman

Donna Celano

Robyn Fischer

Temple University

98-5028

The activity which is the subject of this report, was supported in part by the U.S. Department of Education. However, the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education or the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The Children's Literature Hour:

A Social-Constructivist Approach to Family Literacy

Abstract

Pursued from a social constructivist perspective, this study reports the results of a series of peer group discussions with elementary parents enrolled in a family literacy program at McKinley Elementary School Family Center. The purpose was to provide opportunities for learners to critically reflect on their goals, their literacy strengths and needs, as well as their needs for their children. In total, 18 parents participated in 1-hour discussion sessions of multicultural children's literature books. Eleven of these sessions were videotaped and transcribed. Analysis of the conversations indicated that literacy was seen as important to the extent that it served as a tool to address economic and social concerns. Parents goals for themselves focused on independence, being a role model to their children and self-respect. For their children, they wished to convey a sense of cultural pride, independence from peer pressure, and a "gift of childhood." Viewed from a social-constructivist perspective, it is suggested that family literacy programs should build on these concerns and be context-specific, working collaboratively with participants to create new visions which challenge the status quo.

The Children's Literature Hour:
A Social-Constructivist Approach to Family Literacy

Research supporting the crucial role of the family and early literacy experiences on children's later success in reading and writing has led to an increasing number of programs conceptualized around the family as a unit (Connors, 1993; Nickse, 1990; Paratore & Krol-Sinclair, 1994; Quintero & Velarde, 1990; Winter, & Rouse, 1990). Known widely as intergenerational or family literacy, these programs have been designed to improve the education of the mother or other caregivers in order to improve the family's quality of life as well as the child's achievement. Though varied in design and form (Nickse, Speicher, & Buchek, 1988), programs focus on training parents in literacy and effective parenting skills, assisting children in reading and writing skills, and providing opportunities for parent-child experiences. Consequently, these programs are meant to build on one another, producing a synergistic effect on adults and children. The basic premise is that deep and lasting change for families will occur only when parents have adequate literacy skills to enable them to support their families and when children's growth and development is sustained (Connors, 1994).

A growing number of critics, however, now challenge many of the assumptions that underlie family literacy programs (Auerbach, 1989; Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1993; Heath, 1983; Taylor, 1994). For example, although many program developers support a "family strengths model" (Darling & Hayes, 1989) which recognizes the importance of respecting cultural differences in child-rearing practices, Auerbach (1989) reports that programs continue to perpetuate a "transmission of school practices model." Instructional activities often focus on providing training in effective parenting

skills (i.e. Parents as Teachers Program); giving parents recipe books of ideas for shared literacy activities (i.e. Shared Beginnings); providing packets of programmed materials that concentrate on language and problem-solving skills (i.e., HIPPY).[1] She suggests that the unifying assumption underlying these programs is school-based: parents are taught to transmit the culture of school literacy through the vehicle of the family. Further, family literacy programs like these tend to subscribe to an "autonomous" model of literacy (Street, 1987), assuming that literacy is a set of neutral and objective skills -- independent of any specific social context or ideology -- which once acquired, is contextualized to a progressively wider range of activities.

In contrast, critics (Ferdman, 1990; Reder, 1994) argue that literacy cannot be viewed apart from the social and political context in which it is learned. Rather, literacy is a set of social practices which varies according to contexts, content, purposes and participants (Auerbach, 1993). A large corpus of ethnographic studies now details the wide range of cultural-specific literacy practices and discourse forms among communities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Schieffelin, & Cochran-Smith, 1984; Scollon, & Scollon, 1981; Taylor, & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Weinstein-Shr, 1990). Being literate, then, means more than just encoding or decoding technical symbols. It means using knowledge and experience in a culturally-organized system to make sense of and to act on the world (Lytle, & Schultz, 1990).

Approaching the literacy acquisition process as a "social construction" rather than strictly as a cognitive process (Auerbach, 1993), has a number of instructional implications for family literacy programs. First, this perspective suggests that efforts to impose particular literacy practices on families are

---

[1] Programs reviewed in Morrow, Tracey, & Maxwell (1995). A survey of family literacy. Newark, DE: International Reading Association; and First Teachers (1989). Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy: Author.

bound to be unsuccessful. Instead, instruction needs to begin with the learners' social reality, providing the context for individuals to engage in activities in which written language is constructed and used. Second, it implies that learners acquire literacy practices in collaborative settings in which the collective knowledge of participants develop through sharing and dialogue (Vygotsky, 1978). And third, it suggests that as a constructive process, learners actively contribute to their own learning, thus, transforming the traditional transmission-oriented mode of teaching to one that is dialectical and facilitative of learning and literacy acquisition.

A social constructivist perspective could take advantage of the rich array of experiences that parents may bring to family literacy programs, involving them more integrally in the instructional process. Previous instructional models designed for adult learners have typically relied on replicating the routines of prior schooling (Lytle & Schultz, 1990), focusing on narrowly defined instructional skills as vocabulary or comprehension training. This approach as reviewed by Connors (1994), however, has shown only modest success in improving either the literacy achievement or job opportunities of participants in these programs.

Rather, from a social constructivist view, practices and situations that carry meaning to participants could be used to examine how literacy shapes family life, for what purposes it serves, and how new literacy practices may contribute to enhancing their goals. This collaborative process would invite participants to bring their social and cultural worlds into the classroom to critically reflect on their day-to-day lives, their purposes and needs, creating a context for more active participation in their own and their children's education. Further, a social constructivist perspective might address a source of continuing controversy in family literacy regarding "if and how" caregivers'

literacy skills transfer to children. Viewed from a social constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is seen as internalized through interpersonal interaction, with cultural ways of thinking becoming transformed from social phenomena to one's own intrapersonal functioning. Thus, given opportunities involving critical dialogue and reflection, parents might "expand their possibilities," (Horsman, 1990) influencing subsequent modes of thinking and communicating with others (Chang-Wells & Wells, 1993).

Consequently, this study departs from the tradition of defining family literacy as benefiting either the parent's or the child's academic achievement (i.e. level of literacy performance) to one that is focused on the parents' process of critical reflection. Applied to family literacy, it assumes that the first step toward a more collaborative instructional approach is for those who have been historically underrepresented to become involved in the educational process itself, reflecting on their social reality, (i.e. their day-to-day lives) and examining their goals and needs for access to resources (i.e. the culture of power). This process might not only address the social and structural systems that surround the family, but how these factors might influence their educational aspirations for their young children.

Pursued from a social-constructive perspective, this study contains the voices of parents who are enrolled in a family literacy program at the McKinley Elementary School Family Center. It was designed to illustrate the potential of collaborative interactions with text for the purpose of self-reflection about families and children. Delgado-Gaitan (1994) has noted that family literacy has power as its basis when it creates access to participation and breaks patterns of social isolation. Thus, our purpose was to provide opportunities for learners to investigate and address such critical questions as,

What are their goals? What are their literacy strengths and needs? And what do they want for their children?

Explorations of meaning construction in collaborative groups have taken a number of instructional forms. Among others, book clubs (Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995), grand conversations (Eeds & Wells, 1989), and text-sets (Short, 1992), for example, have emphasized readers' "lived through" aesthetic responses (Rosenblatt, 1978) analyzing readers' own responses and how they may make connections with others. Other approaches, including instructional conversations (Goldenberg, 1992/93), dialogical-thinking reading lessons (Commeyras, 1993), and collaborative reasoning (Waggoner, Chinn, Yi, & Anderson, in press) have addressed literacy from a more critical/analytic stance, focusing on reasoning, argumentation and evidence supported by the text. Although drawing from these stances, our purposes differed from these discussion formats. Here, we sought to use children's literature as a stimulus to engage parents in exploring texts in relation to their own experience, nurturing different perceptions and points of view without setting boundaries or providing clues for potential response categories. Through these discussions, we attempted to view participants as cultural resource persons, listening to their self-expressions and their collective knowledge revealed through dialogue and reflection, thereby approaching family literacy as a socially-constructed collaborative process.

Method

Participants and setting

Families Reading Together is a special demonstration family literacy program in collaboration with the McKinley Elementary School and Family Center. The ultimate goal of this research is to develop the institutionalization of the Family Literacy program through resources available in the community.

The work of forging relationships among groups within schools and between the community requires both partnership and collaboration. To accomplish this goal, we coordinated, with the assistance of the Family Center and School staff, an A.B.E. program for parents and a family literacy program designed to enhance the transmission of literacy learning from parents to children. and to foster a collaboration among educational services provided in the community.

Eighteen parents from two Head Start classrooms participated in the study. Parents were 85% Latino and 15% were African-American. Eleven of the parents had two children; 7 had three children. All were on public assistance. Average grade equivalent score on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), administered to each student upon entering the program was 8.13 (S.D. 1.12), ranging from 3.0 to 10.6.

Our research team included three woman, two of whom were Caucasian, and the other, native African. Each had participated in the family literacy project at the school and child-care sites for over two years, and were frequent visitors at noonday lunches and other special events. All of us (a University professor, a post-doctoral fellow who was pregnant at the time, and a graduate student) were committed to creating collaborative relationships between parents, children and school personnel in family literacy. In our previous work (Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano, Daly, in press)., we had begun a process of dialogue between staff and parents, creating greater parental involvement at the school's child-care site. Current efforts were designed to continue this critical dialogue, focusing on developing a more participatory approach to literacy instruction.

Procedures

Materials. We selected 12 children's literature stories to engage parents in critical reflection about family and children, and their multiple roles (i.e. mother and child). Our choice of using children's literature over more adult fare was guided by two factors: to encourage parents to read and reflect on issues from a child's point of view and to engage in these thinking processes using the medium of text that could be both readable and comprehensible through dialogue and accompanying pictures. Further, previous research had indicated that children's literature could be used effectively as a resource for parenting discussions (Ada, 1988; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994).

Specific book titles were selected on the basis of the following criteria: (a) a multi-cultural focus (10 of 12 books); (b) a powerful child-centered theme (i.e., I am not afraid, an African folktale, dealing with overcoming fears); (c) a focus on various family structures (i.e., single parent; kinship network); (d) an important parenting concern (i.e., sibling rivalry; mother-child bonding); and (e) a book that might be enjoyable to read with their children. Appendix A includes an annotated summary of each story.

Based on scheduling and availability, 6 of the 18 parents attending the ABE classes were invited to the weekly book discussion; 18 parents in total, participated in 4 sessions over the 12-week period. Discussions were held in a quiet room in the school specially-equipped with videotape monitors. All parents agreed to the videotaping procedures. Beginning with refreshments, we attempted to establish a thoughtful but informal atmosphere. After some casual conversation, the facilitator would then begin with an overview statement, "We come here once a week and discuss children's books and general themes that might relate to you and your children. I'm interested in hearing about your ideas. Today the book is (title and author)." Following

some comments and predictions about the story, the facilitator would then pass out the books, and parents would read aloud, stopping at various points to discuss aspects of the story.

Our goal was to create a context for dialogue about literacy and related life issues through the medium of text using nondirective procedures (Krueger, 1988). This approach begins with limited assumptions and places considerable emphasis on getting in tune with participants, offering them opportunity to comment, to explain, and to share experiences. To encourage such engagement, following the reading the facilitator began each book discussion with a general question like "What do you think the author is trying to say?" Efforts were made to evoke parents' interpretations of the meaning of the story. Using an open participation structure, we attempted to involve each participant in examining the story's meaning. Unlike other discussion formats, however, (i.e., Shared books; instructional conversations) we did not determine the thematic focus; rather, our interest was in learning how **they** interpreted the theme. As facilitators, we sought to acknowledge, clarify, and encourage participation by saying, "Do you agree?" "What do you think?" Any other opinions?, creating an instructional context that might support their sharing of individual perspectives.

These conversations then moved toward personal reflections and connections. We encouraged participants to compare their own experiences with that of the story by raising challenging questions, "Do you think that's true? or counter-examples, "I understand your point, but I think..." or alternative scenarios, "So the father comes back into their lives and they all seem happy--do we all really believe that?" provoking further thinking and critical reflection among participants. Once involved, the facilitator would then step back, adopting the role of moderator and good listener -- clarifying

arguments and identifying points of agreement and disagreement when necessary to continue the conversation--rather than an active contributor to the discussion. After about a hour's time, the facilitator ended the session with a brief summing up, highlighting points made throughout the discussion.

In this respect, these discussions differed from other formats in several distinctive ways. First, we were less interested in participants' mastery of the story than in their interpretations and representations of the characters, themes, and events. Second, as opposed to constraining conversation or attempting to develop consensus among participants on an interpretation of text, we sought to spark reflection through dialogue and critical thinking about issues and events. And third, in contrast to other discussion frameworks (i.e., grand conversations), we viewed our role not so much as that of a leader or teacher but as a "conversation maintainer," or occasional "provocateur." In this respect, instead of positioning ourselves in the transmission mode of imparting information, we hoped to create an ecological setting which would facilitate knowledge generation among participants themselves, using text as Bruner (1990) has suggested as "a technology for the empowerment of the mind."

The second author acted as facilitator for all 12 sessions. Discussion time varied from approximately 50 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes, depending on interest in the topic, and averaged 59 minutes per week. All of the sessions (with the exception of "Are you my Mother" due to an equipment malfunction) were transcribed verbatim.

Analysis

The purpose of our analysis was to focus on participants' critical issues, literacy strengths and needs for themselves and their children. Data analysis consisted of examining and categorizing interactions across the 11 transcribed

sessions using procedures developed through focus group methodology, a qualitative research technique (Krueger, 1988). First, transcripts were read and reread by each of us independently. Sections that appeared to reflect the gist of a conversation were marked down, and participant comments were highlighted. Transcripts were then reviewed along with videotapes to ensure that participants were correctly identified, and that the statements were accurate, and appropriately contextualized in each discussion. Second, themes were identified across sessions. Under each theme, actual words used by the participants, the tone and intensity of comments, and specific examples from past experiences in participants lives were placed in categories. Facilitator questions, the book's theme, characters or events--stimuli for comments--were included within the context of these responses. Third, coming together as a group, we first compared categories, providing supporting evidence from transcripts. For example, one category that clearly emerged involved the importance of "a better life for my child." Comments across sessions were aggregated, enabling us to sort, and examine each potential response category.

Two external respondents, who were knowledgeable members of the participant group yet not involved in the data reduction and analysis, were asked review the credibility of these categories and representations. Member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) occurred through a two-phase procedure. In the first phase, we provided an outside respondent with examples of verbal statements in each category, and asked whether the statements consistently reflected the perspective or not. Second, we provided a copy of our analytic categories and interpretations to a leader in the community for her reaction. These procedures were designed to refine our category system and helped us to examine whether our reconstructions were adequate representations of these participants' own reality.

Since the goal of the methodology was to capture the attitudes, perceptions and opinions of the participants, focus group researchers (Cafferata, 1984; Krueger, 1988) generally agree that the presentation of numbers and/or percentages are not appropriate in reporting results; numbers tend to convey the impression that the results can be projected to a population and are not within the capabilities of these qualitative research procedures. Instead, focus group researchers tend to use adjectival phrases reflecting interpretive comments, specifying different points of view, and major ideas.

Comments from the facilitator in this study were generally in colloquial English with occasional regional mannerisms and dialect. Comments from the participants were spoken largely in Puerto Rican slang or Black English Vernacular. As linguists have powerfully demonstrated (Heath, 1983; Labov, 1972) Black English and its regional and social variants follow rules and are rich in social-communicative properties including unique dialogic and narrative features. Consequently, we present the views of participants in their own words, providing insights and reflections about their goals and needs in a family literacy program.

Results

The following analysis is organized in two sections. First, we provide a brief example from a group discussion to contextualize these conversations, describing their nature and process. Then we turn to the central questions of the project, focusing specifically on participants' needs for themselves, and their hopes and desires for their children.

Conversations in Context

To provide an example of these conversations in context, we refer to Papa's Story by Delores Johnson which was presented in Week 8 of the project. The session was attended by 5 women: Chaka, Andrea, Kim, Sidny,

and Somalia. Chosen to generate discussion of parents' beliefs about literacy, schooling and its relationship to family, the conversation about Papa's Story (described in the appendix), illustrates the role of the facilitator, how women engaged in meaning-making, and how they made personal connections throughout these sessions. The conversation begins after the story is read aloud by one of the participants:

Donna (the facilitator): What do you think the author's trying to say in this book?

Andrea: You don't have to be ashamed of it. You can't read, you can't read. That's like my grandfather. My grandfather couldn't read, but I didn't know that. Every time he would get mail, he would hand it to my grandmother.

Somalia: That's like my uncle. He don't even know his address or phone number of anything. Cause we had a fire on the third floor a month ago, and my sister was running around the house yelling, "Call the fire department," and he was going what's the number? What's the number? (everyone laughs).

Andrea: But my grandfather, if he wants to get somewhere, he gets somewhere. He figures it out.

Kim: Don't be ashamed if you can't read.

Andrea: People should accept you as you are. If you can't read, you just can't read.

Sidny: In the long run, you're going to have to learn how to read.

Kim: She wishes just like any person that her father would have told her that he didn't know how to read; but I think she was kind of relieved at the end that her father could read.

Andrea: I heard that a lot of people go through life not knowing how to read, period. They have kids and some be single parents but the kids don't know and they go through 16 years not knowing, and then they get shocked and that it gets them upset.

Donna: Well why didn't the father read?

Sidny: He was saying that when he was young, nobody encouraged him in school to learn how to read. And then having him grow up with low self-esteem, it didn't bother him until he had a child.

Donna: So do you think it was the child that got him to read?

Andrea: Yeah, cause he wanted to read to his daughter; sometimes that makes a lot of kids feel good that mother or father or guardian read to them. They want to hear a story and enjoy it with their families.

Somalia: For some reason, fathers mean alot to kids. Some fathers it makes them want to do more for theirselves. If they hustle on the street it makes them want to get a job cause hustling leads to death, jail or something like that or addiction. It makes them get off the streets and get a job. But I feel he should have told her he couldn't read for me to believe everything you tell me. You lie to me once, I'm through with you.

Chaka: Like me, I was in 9th grade three times--there was no way that I can tell my kids to go to school if I don't go. I used to go to school and sleep in class--the whole day--the bell would ring and I'd go to another class and sleep.

Kim: We're in the same boat. And I'm going to tell my daughter my life story because I've been going through hell.

Chaka: Some women, they just sit on their behinds every morning, collecting their welfare check. They don't do nothing, they don't go to school, and the government--they're going to cut that short.

Andrea: They're going to pass the law so its going to be harder for some people to get on--its important to teach kids to learn and to go to school and in the year 2000 there aren't going to be that many people out there--with drugs, AIDS, killings, and all this wild stuff. Something is going to come out, and kill all of us black people.

(The conversation continues about the problems of getting to school, getting an education and family life).

This excerpt illustrates several important aspects of these discussions. First, it demonstrates the power of a children's story as a stimulus for discussion on issues that critically influence participant's day-to-day lives. In this segment alone, for example, parents described their fears and failures in school; their need to find work, the importance of father figures in their child's life and the ever-present fear of violence in their lives. Second, it illustrates the social aspects of the discussion as a forum for parents to discover that their problems are experienced by other women as well, breaking down patterns of social isolation. Chaka, Andrea and Kim, for example, weave together stories of school experiences, past failures and challenges for the future. Third, and relatedly, it shows the dominance of participants' social and real-life concerns in their interpretations of literature; Papa's Story was soon transformed in this conversation to a discussion of **their** life stories. Fourth, it demonstrates the dynamic of group discussion in confronting issues. For example, participants interactions regarding Papa's dilemma showed evidence of sociocognitive conflict (Almasi, 1995), reflecting differing beliefs from "people should accept you as you are," to "you are going have to learn how to read." Thus, these discussions provided opportunities for conflicting information, and adjusting

interpretations among participants with only occasional provocation from the facilitator. Finally, it illustrates that literacy learning is not an isolated goal in these participant's lives, but part of a series of actions in their continuing efforts to overcome their difficult and complicated histories.

Challenges and Changes: Goals for Family Literacy

Parents' goals revealed in these discussions reflected the social and personal obstacles in their lives; they lived in dangerous neighborhoods; had access to few basic services and few opportunities for employment. Literacy or education in general for themselves, therefore, was seen as important to the extent that it served as a tool to address these conditions, vividly described in their words and stories.

"They're not going to give you but what you can get"

Education was seen by most of the participants as an alternate route--the single, most potent avenue for extricating themselves from what they regarded as intolerable situations, a life based on dependence (i.e. welfare, other family). Having experienced welfare first-hand, many spoke of its limitations. "I can't even buy my child a pair of sneakers with the check they give me" reported Somalia. Painful past experiences with family suggested that help was not likely to be forthcoming. "My son--he was born, he was in to him. But then he just stopped; he don't take care of him, don't give me any money, and he barely sees my child."

Feeling alone, many of the participants believed that changes in their lives would result only from their own actions, and thus aggressively sought resources. "I want everything from this place that they can give me," reported Sidny. Yet, at the same time, some of the women were pessimistic about what resources the program could actually provide. As Andrea described, "I need a diploma, and a job." Replying to her comment, Vera adds "Yeh, but they say

now that even a GED is not going to get a job, you need a high school education and at least two years in college. My friend has all these degrees, and she aint got no job."

Only one parent saw her way blocked by poor basic skills in reading. Elizabeth, for example, describing herself as "good at math," wanted to focus on learning how to read computer manuals, and specific computer skills at school in order to get a job. In most cases, however, "what they could take out of program" was only a paper of marginal value, with literacy skills necessary in order to "pass the test." This seemingly contradictory consciousness captured some ambivalence about their current efforts in the program: viewed instrumentally, some of the participants argued that "what they could get" out of the program was not going to provide them with their goal of independence. Rather, it represented only the road to independence, to be followed by further training in trade school, job training programs, or more education. As Chaka said, "I'm not messing around here for the next two years. I'm getting my GED and I'm out of here. I'm going to this trade school down the street so I can pay my bills. I'm not going to sit and collect my welfare check any more."

"I can't tell my son to go to school if I didn't"

Frequently echoed by participants was the importance of being a role model to their children. "Kids need someone to look up to--how can I tell my kids to go to ninth grade, when I've only gone to 8th grade." Several mothers, like Andrea, specifically wanted something better for their child:

> It wasn't until these kids. But really, I take it seriously now, because I have someone to take care of, and if they grow up like I do; my mom, I don't even know what grade she finished, and you know they ask you about your parents and stuff, and I want my son to be able to say, my mom finished school. I want him to have something good to answer. My mom finished 7th grade--7th grade. And I wouldn't want my son like that. Its no joke to be clean and with education.

Inherent in many of these comments, was the view that to be a role model, one had to "stay in school." The action itself, rather than the literacy skills or strategies to be learned, was valued for its own symbolic reward. Being "educated," therefore, was seen as a way to take better care of their children, to avoid the threat of foster care, and to assert their role of parent and some of the functions that accompanied it.

"You can be what you want to be as long as you put your mind to it"

For some participants, a family literacy program served their needs for something to do, a form of social interaction and a challenge. Monica, for example, found, "I was just sitting around the house and I needed something to do. All my girlfriends were in school and I was alone. I saw my future flash through my eyes, and I said, I know I can do better than this." Demonstrating their resolve to change, for mothers like Monica and Somalia, attendance was seen as a personal goal in itself, "Next week, I have been in this program for a whole month every day straight. I'm really not joking this year. Others, however, sought greater direction from the program as they questioned "what is the right way." As Sidny put it, "I have no role model. I've been back and forth and living with this person and that--I mean I didn't live with my mom until I was 14." Rejecting her previous life style, she was striving for new visions. "Maybe I'll start me a new business." Or maybe I'll be like Maya Angelou-- I can relate to her alot."

Ironically, for the most part however, their dreams of "what you can be," like society at large, focused more on their mistakes than their possibilities. Striking out at their media image, many participantss sought personal vindication for earlier school failure. In this setting, therefore, a primary goal for "what you can be" was an alternative to a high school drop-out. As Somalia emphasized, "You see, you ain't nothing in society without that piece of paper."

Goals for their Children

At the same time, discussions focused on parents' wishes and needs for their children in the program, as described in their words and stories:

"I want him to be proud of his Black culture"

Conveying a sense of cultural pride was seen by many parents as a primary goal for helping children develop educational aspirations and self-esteem. "I want my child to be proud of who he is. I want him to have a sense of his people." Consequently, although some of the parents believed that it was important for their child to be exposed to many different cultures, they were especially concerned about their children's learning the strengths of their **own** culture. Discussing Oh Kojo!, a West-African tale, Andrea noted, "my child might say, well my mom read me a book about Africa, just like a kid from China or Japan could read about their culture, " placing black children on equal ground with others from different cultural traditions. Indeed, mothers described the importance of storying as a tradition in their own families and upbringing, focusing on the strengths and resilience of black families. A Chair for My Mothers, for example, brought descriptions of how families members helped on another through hard times, (i.e., cooking, cleaning, getting odd jobs for relatives) "That's just how **we** do."

At the same time, parents were concerned about buffeting children from painful societal issues-- violence among their own people, and racism in others, "I'm telling you prejudge is alive and kicking and its a shame."

A: What do you do when they ask "why are there different colors?"
B: I wonder what kids say like a Chinese kid or a white kid when they meet someone black.
S: You know what they're saying (they laugh)
S: When I was small, I didn't pay it no mind. But then we started having corny black history month and we would start talking about when were slaves and stuff. And that started racism inside.
B: Yeh, when you first hear it, you get real upset.

S: That's the point I'm trying to get across. When I read a book like this (I am not afraid) to my son, it makes him feel good. And by offering this to him, he'll have a better chance to get along with others.

Thus, for some parents, linkage with African or Latina traditions was especially important for conveying a sense of cultural pride to their children. African folktales, in particular, emphasizing cleverness and fearlessness, seemed to highlight many their own personal qualities as well as their beliefs about child-rearing "Like Anansi, I tell my child you gotta tackle your fears." After reading a folktale, Sidny, "That's a really nice book. I don't want to come off sounding like I'm prejudice or whatever, but we need more of these books for kids, especially black kids. Our young black kids need to be proud of who they are and where they come from."

"Be a Leader, and not a Follower"

Along with a sense of cultural pride, a prevalent theme throughout discussions was that children needed "to be a leader not a follower." They needed to develop qualities of independence that could help them negotiate the powerful forces around them that might cause them to "go the wrong way." Many of these participants, for example, attributed their drop-out status not only to a lack of interest or futility in their future, but overwhelming social pressure from their peers. "Don't be a follower, cause that's what I was. If you want to go to school that day and you see your friends and they say don't go to school that's not cool--don't care what people say." More than any other single factor, keeping their "heads up," and being a leader, according to several parents, would enable them to stay in school.

Some of the mothers sought to isolate their children from what they considered to be bad influences, like neighborhood stores and group hangouts. "I won't let my kid go beyond my porch." In some cases, past experiences also meant isolation from the father, "I don't think its good for a kid to grow like his father." "Yeh, I don't think you should be like this person, or that person. That's like the wrong way to start. You want them to have their own feelings for theirselves. You want them to be their own person."

Yet, being "their own person" did not suggest a rejection of all role models for their children. Rather, mothers sought stories of father figures who might lead children in the "right way." Frustrated with the lack of attention to fathers in An Anteater named Arthur, for example, Elizabeth said: "I'm going to make a story up. Its about a little boy and he always wanted a father figure, but he never had one. So one day, a man comes along and the little boy used to always get bad grades, and never wanted to go outside and play. This

man's like a step father, and helps the kid shoot basketballs, and now the little boy wants to go to school." In striving to encourage children "to be a leader, and not a follower" parents sought to instill through alternative examples, the social and psychological resources to avoid what they considered, predatory influences in their day-to-day lives.

"The problem with these kids is they don't have no childhood"

"I didn't have a childhood," Kim responded when asked if she had a dream like the family in A chair for my mother. "Me neither," said Audrey. "I was taking care of all my sisters and brothers by the time I was 11." Parents described childhood as a period of innocence--a time when children could be free from fear and responsibility. Deprived of a childhood, many wished for these moments for themselves and their children.

I dream of a healthy clean atmosphere. So I don't have to worry about--I got to explain to my mom why this person shot this person, or why the cops is over harassing this person. I know that is the realities of life. And my son's going to confront that one day soon. But when they see something like that, you know it makes them grow up too fast. Just like us.

Giving the gift of childhood to those who had none, however, was not easy for most young parents. To most, childhood was considered a time removed from the difficulties of the adult world--poverty, violence, family squabbles--not to enter a child-oriented world. Consequently, child-like behaviors, like asking questions, or pretending, were taken from an adult perspective, and treated seriously, as in An anteater named Arthur:

LaTanya: He's a hard headed boy. He don't understand much.
Elizabeth: He asks too many questions. I know he don't know, but every question he asks is another one followed by it, with her answers.
Lakeesha: He's crazy. Kids can be a pain in the butt.
Silena: They just try to test your patience to see how far you can go before you do something. If it were me...he wouldn't be coming back through that door.

Sidny: Kids will be asking questions about things they don't know. My son do that. Everything you do, he got to ask you why.

Marguita: But that's how the only way you learn. When a kid asks questions if you keep saying out of my face, out of my face, they won't know nothing. And they'll be real dumb. Every time they ask something you got to tell them, because that's how they learn.

Lakeesha: He's a nuisance. He don't understand. To me, I think he's doing it to be smart. Like a pain.

Elizabeth: One question is enough, not this, this, this.

Latanya: Cause you can't forget that much stuff. He's a problem.

Elizabeth: He's not a bad kid because all kids get to that point.

Donna: Well how much slack do you cut him?

Sidny: Well you got to be patient with him, like at the end he was cute cause he gave his mama a kiss. But all that running in and running out, and forgetting this, and that--no.

Providing "a childhood," for many women, therefore, appeared to focus more on helping their children to avoid life's struggles than on helping to scaffold learning opportunities. In this light, participants' attitudes seemed to reflect the priority that children are lovable and vulnerable little individuals-- to be cherished, nurtured, and most of all, protected.

Conclusions

When parents told us what matters to them, it was clear that the issues they raise, the questions they asked, were dramatically shaped by economic and social factors in their lives. Viewed instrumentally, literacy was seen not as a set of skills to be learned, but as part of a hope for a "better life,"-a life that reflected independence, self-respect, respect from other of their culture, and responsible parenting. Thus, although in some ways, a very diverse group, in other ways parents were fundamental similar to one another--family literacy was part of the change process, a dream to create a different and better future for themselves and their children.

The children's literature hour provided participants with opportunities to discover that their problems were experienced by others caught in similar

circumstances as their own. In this social interactive context, they discussed and expanded on such critical issues as relationships, violence in their lives, and challenges for the future in a dialectical and generative form. In this respect, they became active participants in their own education, connecting literacy--the discourse practices and ways of using language--with real-life social issues and concerns. It is here--in the real conditions and goals of the learners--where a social constructivist approach to family literacy can begin. For example, addressing their interest in conveying a sense of pride of their culture to children might become a source of dialogue for selecting books to read to their child, exploring their own history, and social action--helping to link, as Freire has argued, the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987). From the Freirean perspective (Freire, 1970), it is in the making of this integral connection between literacy learning, personal empowerment, and broader social change that literacy can potentially have an effect on bettering people's lives.

Such programs that listen to participants own account of their needs, can begin to establish a more collaborative approach to instruction. Here, the teacher becomes a facilitator, working with learners to shape a program that meets their needs, and expands their possibilities. Thus, in this respect our project represented an important first step, but only one step in the process. For example, in this study, participants not only needed to critically reflect, but to explore the possibilities for broader challenges which could empower them to achieve new goals. As Horsman (1990) has suggested, they needed "something in my mind besides the everyday", or new visions of "what could be," to challenge the dominant discourses that preserve the status quo.

This learner-centered, social constructivist perspective contrasts sharply with prevalent family literacy service models (see First teachers ,1989

for review). Widely known and cited programs (reviewed by Connors, 1994; Darling & Hayes, 1989), for example, have often focused on pre-determined parenting curriculum, with topics including nutrition, discipline, child development and parenting "skills" regardless of the particular population the program has been designed to serve. Though well-intended, these programs situate knowledge in the hands of the teacher who determines students needs, regardless of the social worlds in which their participants reside. As variable retention records display (Connors, 1994), however, this approach often falters by ignoring the rich knowledge base of learners, their speed of learning and what they may consider to be their essential needs in learning. Further, it has the damaging potential to perpetuate the belief among the participants themselves that they are deficient or incapable of learning.

On the contrary, we would argue for a far different approach, one that is closely tied to the individuals' needs and goals. Rather than importing a service "model," this approach would suggest that family literacy programs must be context-specific, growing out of a common vision created through interactions between facilitative instructors and participants. In this setting, for example, mothers sought ways to help and protect their children, to establish their parent role in difficult family circumstances. Some of these issues could be incorporated in the content of literacy instruction, allowing participants to use literacy as a tool to address these conditions.

Family literacy programs like these could be more sensitive to contextual factors that have traditionally plagued recruitment, attendance and retention in these programs. Unlike some family literacy classes, for example, we found parents eager to attend the children's literature hour, suggesting that opportunities to share individual perspectives and critically reflect together may have represented a forum, a social network for discussing important

family issues more congruent with their learning styles and practices than others.

Such ecological settings that provide opportunities for participants to display, explore, and extend their understandings support the development of practices that value and build on parents' prior knowledge and strengths (Gadsden, 1994; Neuman & Roskos, 1993; Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano, & Daly, in press; Weinstein-Shr & Quintero, 1995). Previous intervention approaches for literacy learners, for example, have often assumed that they were unreflective, life-long welfare-dependents, and cared little about their offspring (Berlin & Sum., 1988; de Lissovay, 1973). The very structure of many of these programs seemed to communicate the message: What is wrong with you? (Musick, 1993). Contrary to this view, our children's literature discussions repeatedly revealed not only their many "funds of knowledge" (Moll, & Greenberg, 1990) but their resilience in responding to the challenges and changes in their lives in the face of tremendous obstacles. As Sidny describes:

> You're gonna to hear about me one day--oh yes you are because I'm not settling for nothing. I want the best for me and mine because if I screw up who's going to take care of my son? His father? I don't think so. I don't know what he wants for his son, but he doesn't want the things that I do. Do you know what I mean? As far as my point of view, he's not going to give my son what I want him to have. I don't want him to have it by the means of drugs, robbery, stealing stuff, and killing; I want him to have it with honesty. If I can do it, I want my son to go in the same direction as I am going. You see, you have to be a little bit stronger with guys because its so easy for them to get into the wrong thing and stick with it and its just a pattern. If I have to drag my baby with me on campus--if I have to strap my baby on my back--I will be here.

Approaches to family literacy should contribute and build on these vital strengths.

References

Ada, A. F. (1988). The Pajaro Valley experience. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas, & J. Cummins (Ed.), Minority Education. Clevedon, PA.: Multilingual Matters LTD.

Almasi, J. (1995). The nature of fourth graders' sociocognitive conflicts in peer-led and teacher-led discussions of literature. Reading Research Quarterly, 30, 314-351.

Auerbach, E.R. (1989). Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. Harvard Educational Review, 59, 165-181.

Auerbach, E. R. (in press). Deconstructing the discourse of strengths in family literacy. Journal of Reading Behavior.

Auerbach, E. R. (1993). Bilingual community literacy training project (Department of Education: Office of Bilingual Education and Language Minority Affairs). University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Battle, S. (1987). The Black adolescent parent. New York: Haworth Press.

Berlin, G. & Sum, A. (1988). Toward a more perfect union: Basic skills, poor families, and our economic future. . NY: Ford Foundation.

Bierman, B. R. & Street, R. (1982). Adolescent girls as mothers: Problems in parenting. In I.R. Stuart, & C. F. Wells (Ed.), Pregnancy in adolescence (pp. 407-426). New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.

Bruner, J. S. (1990). Acts of meaning . Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Cafferata, P. (1984). Guidelines and issues for qualitative research. Chicago, Il: Needham, Harper & Steers.

Chang-Wells, G. L. M. & Wells, G. (1993). Dynamics of discourse: Literacy and the construction of knowledge. In E. Forman, N. Minick, & C. A. Stone (Ed.), Contexts for learning (pp. 58-90.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Commeyras, M. (1993). Promoting critical thinking through dialogical-thinking reading lessons. The Reading Teacher, 46, 486-494.

Connors, L. J. (1993). Project Self Help: A family focus on literacy (Tech. Report No. 13). Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning.

Connors, L. J. (1994). Small wins: The promises and challenges of family literacy (Tech. Report No. 22). Center on Families, Communities, Schools & Children's Learning.

Darling, S. (1989). Kenan Trust family literacy project and program model . Louisville, KY: Kenan Trust Family Literacy Project.

Darling, S. & Hayes, A. E. (1989). Breaking the cycle of illiteracy: The Kenan family literacy model program . Kentucky: National Center for Family Literacy.

de Lissovay, V. (1973, July-August). Child care by adolescent parents. Children Today, , 22-25.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1990). Literacy for empowerment . New York: Falmer Press.

Delgado-Gaitan, C. (1994). Sociocultural change through literacy: Toward the empowerment of families. In B. Ferdman, R.M. Weber, & A. Ramirez (Ed.), Literacy across languages and cultures (pp. 143-170). Albany: SUNY Press.

Eeds, M. & Wells, D. (1989). Grand conversations: An exploration of meaning construction in literature study groups. Research in the Teaching of English, 23, 4-29.

Ferdman, B. (1990). Literacy and cultural identity. Harvard Educational Review, 60, 179-204.

First teachers. (1989). Washington, D.C.: The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed . New York: Seabury Press.

Freire, P. & Macedo, D. (1987). Literacy: Reading the word and the world . So. Hadley, MA.: Bergin & Garvey.

Furstenberg, F. (1976). The social consequences of teenage childbearing . NY: Macmillan.

Furstenberg, F., Brooks-Gunn, J. & Morgan, S. P. (1987). Adolescent mothers in later life . NY: Cambridge University Press.

Gadsden, V. (1994). Understanding family literacy: Conceptual issues facing the field. Teachers College Record, 96, 58-86.

Gallimore, R. & Goldenberg, C. (1993). Activity settings of early literacy: Home and school factors in children's emergent literacy. In E. Forman, N. Minick, & C. A. Stone (Ed.), Contexts for learning (pp. 315-335). New York: Oxford University Press.

Goatley, V., Brock, C. & Raphael, T. (1993). Diverse learners participating in regular education "Book Clubs." Reading Research Quarterly, 30, 352-380.

Goldenberg, C. (1992/93). Instructional conversations: Promoting comprehension through discussion. The Reading Teacher, 46, 316-326.

Heath, S. B. (1983). Ways with words: Language, life, and work in communities and classrooms . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heath, S. B. (1989). Oral and literate traditions among Black Americans living in poverty. American Psychologist, 44, 367-373.

Horsman, J. (1990). Something in my mind besides the everyday. Toronto: Women's Press.

Krueger, R. (1988). Focus groups. Newbury Park: Sage.

Labov, W. (1970). The logic of non-standard English. In F. Williams, Language and poverty: Some perspectives on a theme (pp. 153-187). Chicago: Markham.

Landy, S. & Walsh, S. (1988). Early intervention with high-risk teenage mothers and their infants. Early child development and care, 37, 27-46.

Lytle, S. L. & Schultz, K. (1990). Assessing literacy learning with adults: An ideological approach. In R. Beach, & S. Hynds (Ed.), Developing discourse practices in adolescence and adulthood (pp. 359-385). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Moll, L. & Greenberg, J. (1990). Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction. In L. C. Moll (Ed.), Vygotsky and education (pp. 319-348). Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Morrow, L.M. (1995). A survey of family literacy. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Musick, J. (1993). Young, poor and pregnant . New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Neuman, S.B. & Roskos, K. (1993). Access to print for children of poverty: Differential effects of adult mediation and literacy-enriched play settings on environmental and functional print tasks. American Educational Research Journal, 30, 95-122.

Neuman, S. B., Hagedorn, T., Celano, D. & Daly, P. (in press). Toward a collaborative approach to parent involvement in early education: A

study of African-American teenage mothers, American Educational Research Journal.

Nickse, R. (1990). Family and intergenerational literacy programs: An update of "The noises of literacy". ~~Urbana, IL~~ Columbus, OH: Clearinghouse on ERIC ~~Document Reproduction Service~~. Adult, Career, and Vocational Education.

Nickse, R., Speicher, A. M. & Buchek, P. C. (1988). An intergenerational adult literacy project: A family intervention/prevention model. Journal of Reading, 31, 634-642.

Paratore, J. & Krol-Sinclair. (1994). Parents as classroom storybook readers: What parents and teachers learn about school and home literacies. New Orleans, LA.: Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Conference, New Orleans, LA.

Quintero, E. & Velarde, M. C. (1990). Intergenerational literacy: A developmental, bilingual approach. Young Children, 45, 10-15.

Reder, S. (1994). Practice-engagement theory: A sociocultural approach to literacy across languages and cultures. In B. Ferdman, R.M. Weber, & A. Ramirez (Ed.), Literacy across languages and cultures (pp. 33-74). Albany: SUNY Press.

Rosenblatt, L. (1978). The reader, the text, and the poem . Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Schieffelin, B. B. & Cochran-Smith, M. (1984). Learning to read culturally: Literacy before schooling. In H. Goelman, A.A. Oberg, & F. Smith (Ed.), Awakening to literacy (pp. 3-23). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Scollon, R. & Scollon, S. B. K. (1981). Narrative, literacy and face in interethnic communication . Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Short, K. (1992). Intertextuality: Searching for patterns that connect. In C. Kinzer, & D. Leu (Ed.), Literacy research, theory and practice: Views

from many perspectives (pp. 187-198). Chicago, Il.: National Reading Conference.

Street, B. V. (1987). Literacy and social change: The significance of social context in the development of literacy programmes. In D. Wagner (Ed.), The future of literacy in a changing world (pp. 48-64). Oxford: Pergamon.

Taylor, D. (1994). Family literacy: Resisting deficit models. TESOL Quarterly, , 550-552.

Taylor, D. & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). Growing up literate: Learning from inner-city families . Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waggoner, M., Chinn, C., Yi, H. & Anderson, R. (in press). Collaborative reasoning about stories, Language Arts.

Weinstein-Shr, G. (1990). Family and intergenerational literacy in multilingual families. Washington, D.C.: ERIC National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education.

Weinstein-Shr, G. & Quintero, E. (Eds.) (1995). Immigrant learners and their families. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems Co., Inc.

Wells, G. (1990). Talk about text: Where literacy is learned and taught. Curriculum Inquiry, 20, 369-405.

Williams, C. W. (1991). Black teenage mothers . Lexington, MA.: Lexington Books.

Winter, M. & Rouse, J. (1990). Fostering intergenerational literacy: The Missouri Parents as Teachers program. The Reading Teacher, 43, 382-387.

Children's literature selections

Aardema, V. (1986). Oh Kojo! How could you!. NY: Random House.

Eastman, P. D. (1960). Are you my mother? NY: Random House.

Hoffman, M. (1991). Amazing Grace. NY: Dial.

Johnson, A. (1989). Tell me a story, Mama. NY: Orchard.

Johnson, D. (1994). Papa's stories. NY: Macmillan.

Keats, E.J. (1967). Peter's chair. NY: Harper Trophy

Mann, K. (1993). I am not afraid. New York: Bantam Little Rooster.

McDermott, G. (1972). Anansi the spider. NY: Henry Holt and Company.

Scott, A.H. (1967). Sam. New York: Philomel.

Udry, J.M. (1966). What Mary Jo shared. NY: Scholastic.

Waber, B. (1967). An anteater named Arthur. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Williams, V. B. (1982). A chair for my mother. NY: Greenwillow.

Appendix A

Children's Literature Selections

Week 1: Peter's Chair by Ezra Jack Keats

Peter, a young African-American boy, is feeling dejected because his parents have painted all his baby furniture pink for his new baby sister. Peter decides to run away, taking all of his favorite possessions. After getting as far as the front door, Peter is lured back by his mother who has made his favorite lunch. With his father, Peter paints his baby chair for his new sister.

Week 2: Tell me a story, Mama by Angela Johnson

A young African-American girl and her mother remember together all the girl's favorite stories about her mother's childhood: How the mother was frightened by a scary neighbor, befriended a dog with no tail, and was sent to live with a great-aunt in a far-off city when her parents had to work. Explores the mother's relationship with her own loving mother (the girl's grandmother).

Week 3: Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman

Grace, a young Afro-Carribean girl, loves stories and acts out all the exciting parts--as Hiawatha, Aladdin, or Joan of Arc. Grace tries out for the part of Peter Pan in the school play, despite doubting classmates who say a girl, especially a black girl, cannot play the lead. With support from her mother and grandmother, Grace keeps in mind that she can be anything she wants to be--and wins the part.

Week 4: I am not afraid by Kenny Mann

In this authentic African folktale, Leyo, small and meek, has much to learn from his brave older brother, Tipilit. Despite Tipilet's attempts to show Leyo how to respect--not fear--the mighty river and trees of the forest, Leyo still acts cowardly. One night, a mighty nine-headed demon comes to their camp while they are sleeping. Tipilit rescues his little brother, who from then on, shows no fear of the mighty river and trees of the forest.

Week 5: An anteater named Arthur by Bernard Waber

Arthur, a lovable anteater boy, has some troubles: Understanding why he is called an anteater, finding friends to play with, keeping his room tidy, and forgetting things for school. Told by his mother, this story shows that although Arthur may have his difficulties, he handles them in a resourceful way.

Week 6: Are you my mother? by P.D. Eastman

A baby bird emerges from his egg while the mother is off looking for food. He goes in search of her. "Are you my mother?" he asks a cat, a hen, a dog,

and a cow. Finally, a steam shovel accidentally deposits him back in his nest where he is joyfully reunited with his mother.

Week 7: Anansi the spider by Gerald McDermott

In this West African tale, Anansi the spider sets out on a long, difficult journey. Threatened by fish and falcon, Anansi is rescued through the efforts of his six sons. At home again, Anansi wonders which of his sons to reward with a beautiful globe of white light. Nyame, the God of All Things, helps Anansi by placing the globe (the moon) in the sky every night for all to enjoy.

Week 8: Papa's stories by Delores Johnson

Kari, a young African-American girl, loved when her father would read her stories each night, including her favorite, "Little Miss Too-Big-For-Her-Red-Britches." Kari especially enjoyed how the stories would change each time Papa read them. When a neighbor shows Kari that the words in the story are different than what Papa reads, Kari discovers her father has never learned to read. Confronting him, he admits the truth, and at the same time, shows off some new reading skills.

Week 9: What Mary Jo shared by Janice May Udry

Mary Jo, a young African-American girl, cannot find the perfect thing to talk about during sharing time at school. Each day, she thinks about sharing but cannot find something no one else has brought in. Finally, she discovers the perfect thing to share--her father. When the class reacts enthusiastically to her father's visit, Mary Jo learns that her contributions in class are prized.

Week 10: A chair for my mother by Vera B. Williams

Rosa's family's possessions are destroyed in a fire. Rosa, her mother and grandmother save their coins in a big jar. After a year, the Latina family can afford to buy a big, comfortable chair that all three can enjoy.

Week 11: Oh Kojo! How could you! by Verna Aardema

In this West African tale, Kojo, a young boy, is tricked by the mischievous Anansi into spending market money for a dog, cat, and a dove. When the dove turns out to be a Queen, Kojo returns the dove to her native land, where he is rewarded with a magic ring. Kojo becomes a rich chief of the village, but Anansi has the ring stolen. Kojo sends the dog and cat to retrieve, but only the cat successfully follows orders. From then on, all cats have received better treatment than dogs in Ashantiland.

Week 12: Sam by Ann Herbert Scott

Sam, a young African-American boy, tries to play with his mother, brother, sister, and father. All of them, however, are too busy to play with

Sam. Feeling rejected by his family, Sam retreats and begins to cry. Realizing they have hurt his feelings, Sam's family reaches out and involves him in a family activity.